



Society of East Asian Studies 6th Annual Graduate Symposium:

Lives Across Borders

April 13, 2019, University of Illinois

ABSTRACT

Separation and Connectedness through Travels Towards the Peach Blossom Spring: The Lack of Correspondence Between Diasporic Spaces

Zihan Feng, Duke University

Originated from Tao Yuanming's depiction, the peach blossom spring is a household Chinese utopian imagination manifesting the diasporic status. Concerning the significance of the one-time travel in the quest for the peach blossom spring, the diasporic utopia reveals an ideal space of non-place, which is accessible but cannot be integrated. The quasi-peach-blossom-spring narrative frequently emerges in contemporary Taiwan's cultural productions, which challenges a homogeneous national discourse and manifests the temporal and spatial distortion of the Chinese diaspora, particularly when cross-strait travels were permitted after a long-term forbiddance.

To unravel the diasporic spatial tension between separation and connectedness underlined by the one-time travel, this paper examines Stan Lai's play *Secret Love/Peach Blossom Spring* (暗恋桃花源) and proposes to demonstrate that the peach blossom spring is exploited to intervene in the disruptive cross-strait politics and diasporic memories in post-martial-law Taiwan through a theatrical representation of lack of correspondence between spaces. The play delineates two troupes' encounter on stage for rehearsal, while the hilarious and disordered rehearsal alludes to the traumatic diasporic experiences for mainlanders in Taiwan.

I argue that a threefold connotation of the peach blossom spring unveils in the piece, including a juxtaposed *mise en abyme* played by a troupe, a utopian symbol for futile searching and status of "Self-oblivion." Accordingly, the embeddedness and invagination in structural and genre arrangement, the coexisting demarcation and heteroglossia in acting and a mediated politics of memory disclose the lack of correspondences. The lack of correspondences between spaces manifest the tension since rules are simultaneously established and subverted, demarcations are simultaneously drawn and violated, and the spatial and incarnated utopia emerges and meanwhile vanishes, which debunks the ambivalent complicity of utopia and dystopia for the mainlanders in Taiwan when connections across the border recur after decades of separation.